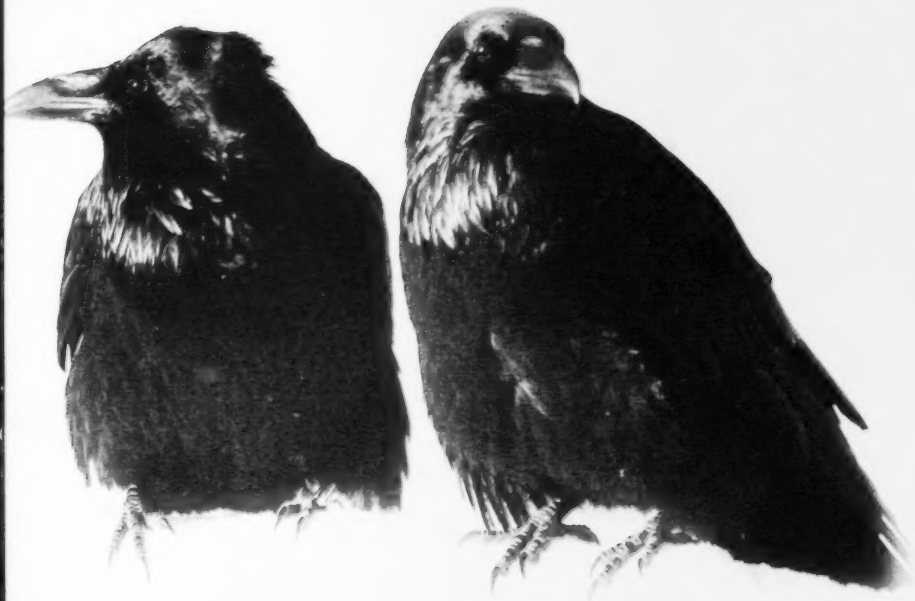
VIEWING YUKON'S Natural History ATTRACTIONS



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Introduction

This booklet is a guide to facilities in Yukon that offer natural history interpretation to the visitor. Visit museums and interpretive centres from Watson Lake to Old Crow to learn about the geology, northern lights and wildlife of the Yukon.

Yukon is on the northern end of a series of relatively young mountain ranges that stretch from Mexico to Alaska. Yukon rocks record over a billion years of geologic history. The landscape tells a story of exploding volcanoes, grinding glaciers, immense inland seas and millions of years of mountain building. Yukon is divided by a huge fault line with a northwest trend that separates the older sedimentary rocks of the northern Yukon from the more complex younger rocks to the south. Rich deposits of copper, gold, coal, lead, zinc, silver and gem quality stones have shaped the Yukon's social and economic history.

Yukon is home to four species of amphibians, 63 species of mammals, 224 species of birds, 1,184 species of plants and over 1,500 species of insects with many of these interpreted at various centres. Some regions are becoming increasingly well known for the quality and frequency of the northern lights that shine through the long northern nights. The lights are explained through myth and science at our natural history attractions.

The key to successful wildlife viewing as you drive through the territory is knowing where and when to look. Pick up a copy of *Yukon's Wildlife Viewing Guide* for travel along Yukon's major highways and enjoy the kilometre-by-kilometre descriptions of Yukon's flora and fauna. The Yukon Government and the Yukon Conservation Society also offer free interpretive walks and lectures around the territory. Call 1-800-661-0408 (ext. 8291) or visit www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/viewing for more information. If you are travelling by yourself in the back country pick up a free copy of *Into the Yukon Wilderness*.

1. Watson Lake Northern Lights Centre

Heather Berg photo

The aurora borealis (northern lights) can be seen above the magnetic north and south poles when electrically charged particles from the sun collide with the earth's atmosphere. Electrons and protons are blown towards the earth on solar winds. These charged particles are generally deflected by the earth's magnetic field, except at the north and south poles where the field is weakest. The aurora can appear as patches of light or in streamers, arcs or rippling curtains created 80 km to 640 km above the surface of the earth. The northern and southern auroras are usually mirror images with similar shapes and colours. Winter in the north, just about midnight, is a good time to see the northern lights. Visit the Northern Lights Centre at Watson Lake to see the planetarium show and the exhibits on space. Call (867)536-7827, e-mail nlc@yknet.ca or visit the website at www.northernlightscentre.ca for more information.

2. Swan Haven Interpretive Centre

M'Clintock Bay on Marsh Lake has some of the earliest open water in the region and hosts a spring spectacle of returning water birds. Trumpeter and Tundra swans, widgeons, Canada Geese, Northern Pintails, shorebirds, plus eagles, wolves, and other predators abound in this small bay and are easily seen from the observation decks of Swan Haven Interpretive Centre. Trumpeter swans were on the list of endangered species but have made a successful recovery and now over 10,000 of these birds land at M'Clintock Bay every spring. Shallow water provides easy access to food, good visibility, and little disturbance. These are all necessary for the continued health of water birds. M'Clintock Bay is a critical stopover on the long migration to their northern nesting grounds. The best time to visit the Interpretive Centre is from late March to early May.

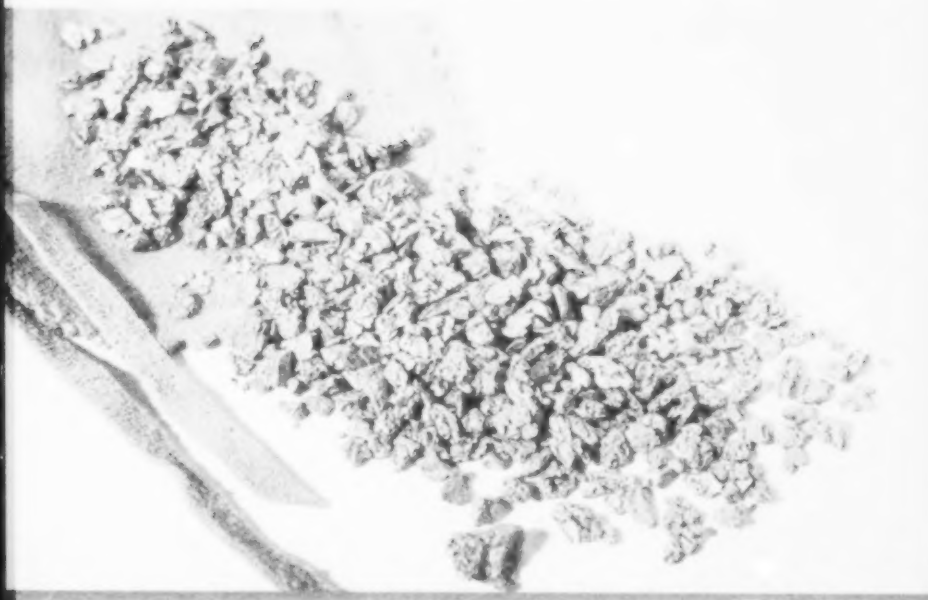
The Celebration of Swans annual festival welcomes the return of the swans during their spring migration. Join a guided walk and find out how the migration is faring, or relax on a viewing deck. Inside the Centre, you'll find interpretive displays and information about the birds flying through every spring. If your visit doesn't coincide with the migration, a visit to the outdoor displays will give you a taste of what spring is like in the southern Yukon. Contact the Yukon Wildlife Viewing Program for more information. Call 1-800-661-0408 (ext. 8291) or visit the website at www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/viewing.

3. Whitehorse Fishway Interpretation Centre

YTG photo

The Whitehorse Fishway, adjacent to the Yukon Energy hydro dam, is one of the longest wooden fish ladders in the world. Built in 1959, just after completion of the dam, the fishway allows fish, especially spawning salmon, to bypass the electrical turbines. You can watch the fish through viewing windows in the Interpretation Centre and learn more about the life cycle of the Chinook salmon and other Yukon River species. There are freshwater fish exhibits and holding tanks for migrating salmon. The facility is most active when the salmon start running in July and August. Before the big spawning run, visitors can see Chinook salmon fry (babies) slowly making their way down the Yukon River, and there are usually a number of grayling passing by the viewing windows. During the salmon run, viewing platforms above the Yukon River are interesting places to observe the migration. You can get close to the thundering whitewater to watch the seagull rookery on a rocky outcrop by the Yukon River. The Centre is at the start of the 15.5 kilometre Yukon River Loop Trail. Interpretive panels along the route describe the flowers, grasses and fish species of the area. The Fishway Interpretation Centre is located on the east side of the Yukon River at the end of Nisutlin Drive in the Riverdale subdivision of Whitehorse. Call (867)633-5965 for further information or visit the website at www.yukonfga.com/fishway.htm.

4. MacBride Museum



YTG photo: gold nuggets

MacBride Museum offers a wealth of natural history specimens to its visitors. A new gallery features mineral samples that document the geological history of the Yukon. The gallery also chronicles the human side of mineral exploration from the surveyors who came in the late nineteenth century, mapping the land and its features, to the throngs of stampeders of the Klondike Gold Rush who came searching for the elusive precious metal. The Rivers of Gold exhibit showcases the largest public collection of Yukon placer gold. Learn about past and current mining technologies and discover the definition of a true Yukon placer miner. In the summer season, you can try your hand at gold panning, with daily demonstrations and the opportunity to find your own treasure. What's the difference between a woodland and a barrenground caribou? Find out at the Yukon Wildlife exhibit where visitors can view the amazing array of animals and birds that inhabit the Yukon. Grizzly bears, moose, caribou and big horned sheep are just a sample of the creatures on display at the MacBride Museum. Natural history and natural wonder, come and discover it at the MacBride Museum. For more information call (867)667-2709, e-mail them at info@macbridemuseum.com or visit the website at www.macbridemuseum.com.

5. Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre

Angic George "Ranaldino" Teichmann: Beringian animals

For the past two-and-a-half-million years the climate of the northern hemisphere has been dominated by very cold weather. So much moisture was trapped as thick ice sheets over Canada, northern Europe and some of Asia that sea levels dropped 100-150 metres, exposing new land connecting Asia and North America. The dry, steppe-tundra landscape of Beringia stretched from central and northern Yukon into Siberia and supported a strange and wonderful world of plants and animals. Fossilized bones from a giant Jefferson's ground sloth have been found near Old Crow and date from 150,000 to 130,000 years ago. The 1.6-million-year-old caribou bones found near Fort Selkirk are the second oldest caribou fossil remains to be discovered in the world. Saiga antelope, now only found in central Asia, lived around and north of the Klondike River drainage during a glacial advance when the land was dry, open and grassy. Woolly mammoths, Beringia's most symbolic animal, are now known only in First Nation legends or as fossils. At the Beringia Centre you can touch the shin bone of a woolly mammoth that walked the earth more than 10,000 years ago. Visit the Beringia Centre to learn about past landscapes and why ice ages occur. Call (867)667-8855, e-mail beringia@gov.yk.ca, or visit the website at www.beringia.com for more information.

6. Kluane National Park and Reserve of Canada

YTG photo: Dall sheep

Kluane National Park and Reserve protects 22,000 sq. km. of immense icefields and lush river valleys that have a diverse array of plant and wildlife species. Mt. Logan, Canada's highest mountain, is in this southwest corner of the Yukon, along with nine of the ten highest peaks in Canada. This incredible park, along with the Tatshenshini – Alsek Wilderness Park in British Columbia, and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Glacier Bay State Park in Alaska, is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visit the Kluane National Park Visitor Centre throughout the year at Haines Junction to learn about the changing landscape and local wildlife. The Tàchal Dhal (Sheep Mountain) Visitor Centre, 70 km north of Haines Junction, is open daily from mid-May to early September. The Dall sheep population at Tàchal Dhal can be seen on the slopes of their winter range between late August and May. The face of the mountain is a special preservation zone so check with the centre before setting off on a hike. Park staff are available at both centers for information on the many recreation and hiking opportunities in the park. Interpretive activities are available that include campfire talks, guided walks, and special events. Phone (867)634-7250, e-mail kluane_info@pc.gc.ca, or visit the website at www.pc.gc.ca/kluane for more information.

7. The Kluane Museum of Natural History

YTG photo: Polar bear

The Kluane Museum of Natural History features wonderful dioramas interpreting over 70 Yukon animals, birds and fish. Mountain, stream and boreal forest habitat are realistically displayed. Exhibits are arranged on many different levels and most are wheelchair accessible. You can climb up to get a close-up view of mountain goats and thin horn sheep. The Yukon population of sheep is estimated at 22,000 and 19,000 of these are Dall sheep. Dall sheep are the only wild white sheep in the world and they are abundant in the southwest Yukon. The museum also displays a number of cultural artifacts and traditional clothing, and interprets the relationship between the Southern Tutchone speaking people and the land. The gift shop features local crafts, hand-sewn moose hide moccasins, and northern books and videos. Admission includes the wildlife video theatre. The museum, at Historic Mile 1093 of the Alaska Hwy., is in the unique community of Burwash Landing located on the shores of Kluane Lake and beside the St. Elias Mountains. Call (867)841-5561 (mid May to mid Sept.) or e-mail kluanemus@yknet.ca for more information.

8. Yukon Wildlife Preserve

YTG photo: Caribou

The Yukon Wildlife Preserve is a 300-hectare property featuring major species of boreal and arctic mammals. Moose, woodland caribou and mule deer are presented in their natural environment for an unparalleled viewing experience. The wetlands attract over 60 species of birds, including many of the 21 species of hawks and owls common to Yukon. You will be sure to see bald and golden eagles. Look for musk ox on open land with tall grasses, sheep and goats by the cliffs, and elk in the forested regions. The biggest elk in North America are very popular with amateur and professional photographers. Animal populations are maintained at a level that respects the capacity of the land. The Wildlife Preserve maintains detailed genetic and other records, participates in species-recovery programs, and has a program for rehabilitating wild animals. The visual aspect of fences and structures is minimised to maintain a high standard for photographic opportunities. Enjoy safe, 75-minute guided interpretive tours of the Preserve at scheduled departure times throughout the day. Displays and hands-on exhibits introduce the northern flora and fauna to visitors at the log gatehouse. Call (867)633-2922 or visit the website at www.yukonwildlife.ca for more information.

9. Campbell Region Interpretive Centre
Faro Arboretum

Frank Nez photo

The full-service community of Faro lies in central Yukon near the Tintina Trench, a unique geological feature extending from British Columbia to Alaska. At Faro, the trench acts like a funnel for migrating birds, and each spring and fall 100,000 Sandhill Cranes fill the skies for a few weeks. Faro's Annual Crane & Sheep Viewing Festival is held during the first week in May. Unique Fannin thin horn sheep winter near town and can be seen in the spring and fall from the Faro Sheep Viewing Centre. Visit the Campbell Region Interpretive Centre to find out about guided nature walks, workshops, Wild Meat BBQs, Campfire Chats and several wildlife viewing decks around town. The Van Gorder Falls Trail starts nearby and winds an easy 1.5 km through the forest and across the creek, ending at a viewing deck overlooking the falls. Just north of town, the Faro Arboretum exhibits a variety of labeled local plants, and there are benches and interpretive panels along a 1.2 km loop trail. This is the most northerly arboretum in North America. Faro is also connected to an extensive, well marked, multi-use trail network. The 80-km Dena Cho Heritage Trail runs between the communities of Ross River and Faro and offers some spectacular views and four warming cabins with tent spots along the route. Call (867)994-2288, e-mail cric@faroyukon.ca May-Sept or visit the website at www.faroyukon.ca for more information.

10. Binet House Interpretive Centre

Charlie Rivista photo: folded guartzite specimen

The Village of Mayo operates the Binet House, a heritage building with exhibits on rock formation and mineralization, mining history, permafrost and local flora and fauna. Mayo Landing was established in 1903 at the head of sternwheeler navigation on the Stewart River. It became the supply centre for gold mining operations on Duncan and Lightning creeks, about 40 km northwest. Between 1915 and 1989 the town thrived as silver, lead and zinc concentrate was shipped from underground mines in the same area. This region of central Yukon is blessed with long, warm summers and very cold winters, especially in the valley bottoms. Permanently frozen ground, beneath a shallow "active layer" which thaws in summer, produces "drunken" forest, humpy moss-covered forest floor, and swamps with collapsing edges. Mayo is famous in the science community for a long-term and on-going study of permafrost, conducted as a useful indicator of gradual climate change. Articles on this work, as well as a display about permafrost in the area, can be seen at the Binet House. Services and supplies are available in Mayo for exploring the network of mining roads that radiate from Keno City, and for river and overland expeditions. Stop at Devil's Elbow, at km 9 on the Silver Trail, near productive moose calving grounds in the wetlands and islands of the Stewart River. There is an observation lookout and interpretive signage on the north side of the highway and parking on the south. Call (867)996-2317 or e-mail mayo@northwestel.net for more information.

11. Keno City Alpine Interpretive Centre

YTG photo: Canadian Tiger Swallowtail, *Papilio Canadensis*

Keno City's northerly mountain location offers unusual wildlife and beautiful scenery. As part of Beringia, the area was ice free during the last ice age and some of the plants and animals are unique to the grassland that stretched into Siberia. Natural history exhibits are presented in a small building next to the Keno City Mining Museum. Drop in to learn about alpine tundra butterflies, wildflowers and mammals. Keno's butterflies attract enthusiasts from all over the world. Please be advised that it is illegal to collect them without a Yukon Scientists and Explorers Permit. Butterflies need the heat of a warm sun before they can fly and so the time to see them is early to mid July. If you miss the butterflies you can enjoy some of the 91 known species of wildflowers on Keno Hill. This is the place to plan a hike. The centre describes local trails and scenic viewpoints, and the old mining roads of the region offer easy access to panoramic landscapes. You can drive above the tree line and see marmots and picas. The marmots are slow moving and many alpine birds nest right on the ground so watch your step and please keep your dog on a leash if you are enjoying a walk. Call the Keno City Mining Museum at (867)995-3103 or visit the website at www.kenocity.info/museum.htm for more information.

12. Dawson City Museum and Historical Society

YTG photo

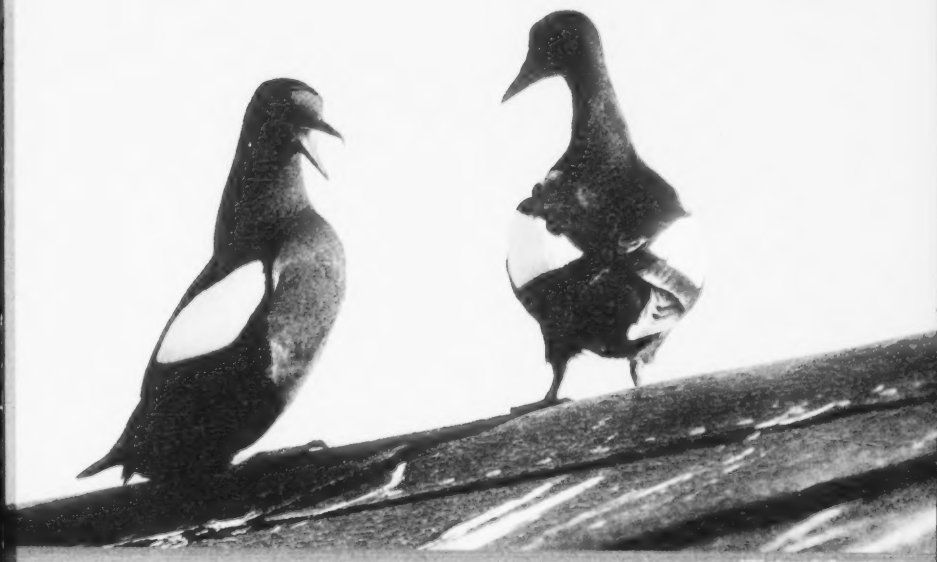
The Dawson City Museum and Historical Society is in the heart of the Klondike Mining District and on the edge of the Beringian landscape. The museum has a gallery devoted to displays on geology, glaciation, the Tintina Trench, gold mining and Beringian fossils. There is daily gold panning, rocker box and smelting demonstrations and the staff are very knowledgeable about prospecting and mining in the region. Visit the museum library to view a collection of photographs that document the history of placer mining in the Klondike Goldfields. The gift shop offers a wide selection of natural history books. Call (867)993-5291, e-mail dcmuseum@yknet.yk.ca or visit the website at http://users.yknet.yk.ca/dcpages/Museum.html.

13. Tombstone Park Interpretive Centre

Sara Nielsen photo. Purple Crest, Oxytropis purpurea

Tombstone Territorial Park is Yukon's newest territorial park and is located on the Dempster Highway 70 km north-east of Dawson City. The Dempster is the only public road in Canada that crosses the Arctic Circle. The highway runs through the park that protects over 2,164 sq. km of the south Ogilvie Mountains and sub-arctic wilderness. Dall sheep, moose, caribou and bears plus a number of birds unique to the region make their home here. The north end of the park is an arctic tundra environment while the south end is covered in boreal forest. Short hikes into the tundra from the highway can provide dramatic views of the craggy peaks and unusual landforms in a mainly treeless landscape. There are a few well-established trails into the park but the majority of hikes will try your orienteering skills. You will be on your own, so be prepared for rough terrain, drastic weather changes and encounters with wildlife. Those planning overnight trips into the backcountry can rent bear-proof food canisters at the Interpretive Centre. The Tombstone campground and Interpretive Centre is located 71.4 kilometres up the Dempster Highway and the Centre provides displays, interpretive walks and talks, and information on the park. Contact Yukon Parks at (867)667-5648 or visit the website at www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/parks/tombstone.shtml for more information.

14. Herschel Island Territorial Park



YTG photo: Guillemots

Yukon's first territorial park was established on Herschel Island (Qikiqtaruk) in 1987 to preserve Yukon and Inuvialuit cultural and natural heritage. The 116 sq. km island lies just five kilometres off the north coast of the Yukon Territory and 90 km south of the permanent Arctic Ocean ice pack. The island has a dry arctic climate but the warm, nutrient-rich Mackenzie River water drifts out to the island to nourish a food chain that includes arctic cod, arctic char, pacific herring and arctic flounder. Bowhead whales migrate westward to the Bering Sea in September and Beluga whales can also be seen during the open water period. Ringed seals are the most common marine mammals in this part of the Arctic, and where there are ringed seals there are polar bears. Caribou, muskoxen, and grizzly bears are occasionally seen on the island, but lemmings, tundra voles and arctic shrews are more common residents. The bird life of Herschel includes over 90 species, 40 of which breed on the island. From late June to early August, nearly 200 plant species can be found including a profusion of flowers such as vetches, louseworts, arctic lupines, arnicas, and forget-me-nots. Contact Yukon Parks at (867)667-5648 or visit the website at www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Herschel/English/menu.html for more information.

At a Glance

Binet House Interpretive Centre – Mayo
Phone: (867)996-2317
E-mail: mayo@northwestel.net

Campbell Region Interpretive Centre, Faro Arboretum – Faro
Phone: (867)994-2288
E-mail: cric@faroyukon.ca May-Sept
Website: www.faroyukon.ca

Dawson City Museum and Historical Society – Dawson City
Phone: (867)993-5291
E-mail: dcmuseum@yknet.yk.ca
Website: http://users.yknet.yk.ca/dcpages/Museum.html

Herschel Island Territorial Park
Phone: Yukon Parks at (867)667-5648
Website: www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Herschel/English/menu.html

Keno City Alpine Interpretive Centre – Keno
Phone: (867)995-3103
Website: www.kenocity.info/museum.htm

Kluane Museum of Natural History – Burwash Landing
Phone: (867)841-5561 (mid May to mid Sept.)
E-mail: kluanemus@yknet.ca

Kluane National Park and Reserve of Canada – Haines Junction
Phone: (867)634-7250
E-mail: kluane.info@pc.gc.ca
Website: www.pc.gc.ca/kluane

MacBride Museum – 1st Avenue and Wood Street, Whitehorse
Phone: (867)667-2709
E-mail: info@macbridemuseum.com
Website: www.macbridemuseum.com

Swan Haven Interpretive Centre – Alaska Highway
Phone: Yukon Wildlife Viewing Program at 1-800-661-0408 (ext. 8291)
Website: www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/viewing

Tombstone Park Interpretive Centre – Dempster Highway
Phone: Yukon Parks at (867)667-5648
Website: www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/parks/tombstone.shtml

Watson Lake Northern Lights Centre – Alaska Highway, Watson Lake
Phone: (867)536-7827
E-mail nlc@yknet.ca
Website: www.northernlightscentre.ca

Whitehorse Fishway Interpretation Centre – Nisutlin Drive, Whitehorse
Phone: (867)633-5965
Website: www.yukonfga.com/fishway.htm

Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre – Alaska Highway, Whitehorse
Phone: (867)667-8855
E-mail: beringia@gov.yk.ca
Website: www.beringia.com

Yukon Wildlife Preserve – Takhini Hotsprings Road, Whitehorse
Phone: (867)633-2922
Website: www.yukonwildlife.ca

This guide is provided as a community service. Any suggestions you have for inclusion in a future publication are welcome. Please contact YTG Cultural Services Branch at (867)667-5458.

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2. Swan Haven Interpretive Centre
3. Whitehorse Fishway Interpretation Centre
4. MacBride Museum
5. Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre
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9. Campbell Region Interpretive Centre, Faro Arboretum
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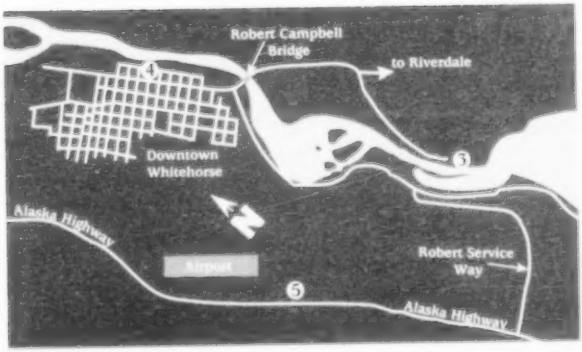
11. Keno City Alpine Interpretive Centre
12. Dawson City Museum and Historical Society
13. Tombstone Park Interpretive Centre
14. Herschel Island Territorial Park



Yukon
Tourism and Culture